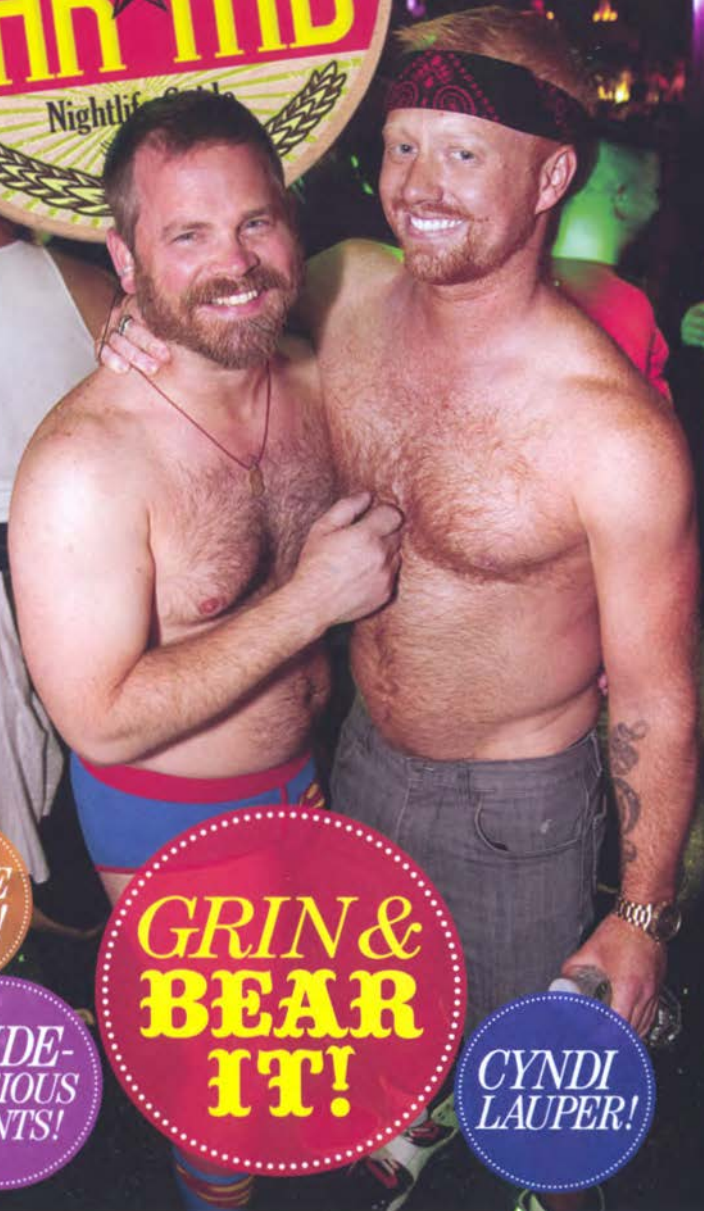


**ON THE  
TAB!**

JUNE  
EVENTS



**PARADE  
TALES!**

**PRIDE-  
ALICIOUS  
EVENTS!**

**GRIN &  
BEAR  
IT!**

**CYNDI  
LAUPER!**



## PRIDE-ALICIOUS EVENTS

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On the cover: Bear pals enjoy yet another  
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ANOTHER PLANET ENTERTAINMENT



# BEFORE THE PARADE

## Gay Pride's Roots

by Dr. Jack Fritschler

The original Gay Parade started inside a bar the night of June 28, 1969, when drag queens ran out of Stonewall into the streets. Or did it?

Seventy-four years earlier, in the parallel universe of June 9, 1896, old school San Francisco clubs and bars sponsored a "Cyclers in Gay Attire" parade of floats built on bicycles as reported in the *San Francisco Call*. It is archetype of our arche-tribe—and of our self-selecting Gay Identity Parade. At 8pm, the grand "Marshal of the Night" struck up the Souza band with a 4/4 beat, forecasting the decades-later disco floats with Sylvester and Jeanie Tracy, muscular DJs, and ripped dancers from Buzzby's, the I-Beam, Oil Can Harry's, and Trocadero.

Those "Gay '90s" revelers, led by mounted SFPD, marched up Market to Van Ness past cheering thousands drowned out by brass bands, floats, and flaming fireworks carts. They decorated bicycles, carriages, and wagons with "...lanterns, bunting, flowers and ribbons to make" the floats "gaudy and attractive."

Like us dragged up in the 1970s a la the casts of *Hair*, *The Wild One*, and *Baby Jane*, 1890s pre-Hollywood marchers costumed themselves in pop-culture "riding attire, some plain, some gorgeous, some comic and many grotesque. Some of the young men appeared [in drag] as the 'New Woman' and as the 'Bloomer Girl,' while others appeared as clowns... a gay and festive picture... [of] gayly trimmed bicycles."

"After the mounted police," first "came the Alpha (ladies) Cycling Club," like our Dykes on Bikes, followed by twenty city clubs predicting our own sponsoring bars, bike clubs, and organizations. The Olympic Club float featured "a Roman gladiator... extending the hand of fellowship to the modern cyclist" prefiguring our go-go beef floats with leathermen rampant on the Brig's flatbed truck, and original Cockettes camping aboard the Stud truck before creating their own 1978 "Children of Paradise" float.

The Imperial Club's "1896 SPCA Hoat" rocked "an immense elephant" signed "Don't Tease the Animals."



Bulldog  
Bath House  
hunk in 1979.

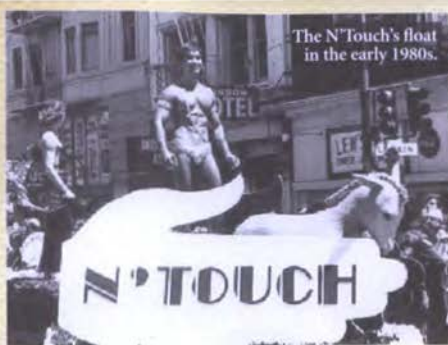
In 1975, Imperial Empress Doris, funded by Polk/Tenderloin bars like the Kokpit, locked her legs around the neck of the rent-an-elephant she rode up Polk Street.

Diverse before us, those 19th-century strutters donned "Continental costumes, [with] two pages [male] in full silver suits, Indians, colored [sic] and Chinese cyclers...and many riders in fantastic garb. A number of cyclers dressed up "as boats with full sail. Another [rider] in imitation of a flatcar had a banner on which" he had painted his cause: "This train carries bicycles free." Another transportation activist, in this last decade before automobiles, pulled a coffin saying: "Killed by riding a [bike] wheel over the Market Street pavement."

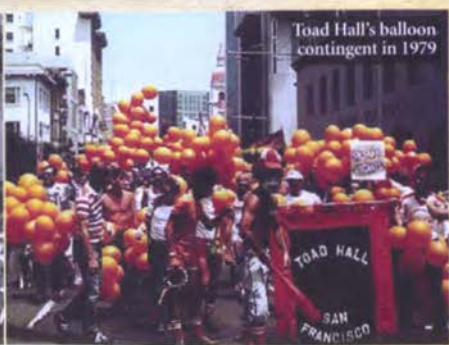
This amazing *deja vu* news feature gaily concluded: "They came, the fantastic glittering phalanx... in carnival array with music and red fire.... They passed like colors and forms in the [rainbow?] kaleidoscope, leaving an impression of something beautiful and odd."

How odd? Parade awards went to "C. E. Harrison" as "the Tough Girl" in an age when liberated females coded gender through initials. Another float, assaying ethnicity, depicted Chinese culture similar to the muscular Pharaoh on 1979's golden "King Tut" float sponsored by the Castro Café.

So strike up the band, the "boys" in it, and play on! In the 1960s, we GLBTs reinvented the word gay, claiming ownership on banners in 1970's first parade populated by drag queens and Tenderloin transgenders who had acted up in the streets outside Compton's Cafeteria in 1966. You don't need a Gay Rosetta Stone, or forage with a queer theorist, to know it takes 21st-century deduction to reveal legitimate 19th-20th-century



The N' Touch's float in the early 1980s.



Toad Hall's balloon contingent in 1979

GLBT history hidden in the code words of factual texts and nonsexual topics, like the *Call* article, written years before our love dare self-identify with brilliant new vocabulary.

Was the *Call* reporter, writing the word 'gay' four times, cautiously embedding his subtextual riddles about homosexuality? That very year one of San Francisco's most flaming visitors, Oscar Wilde, a master dramatist of fluid identities, was famously in prison for being queer. In eerie hindsight, exactly ten years later, these 1896 paraders would suffer the 1906 Earthquake the way 1970s marchers would face AIDS.

From SF's first gay parade, June 28, 1970, the performance art in bars jumped like wildfire to floats in the streets. Gay bars provided funding and themes for the first "floats" which were basically convertibles filled with Polkstrasse drag queens and politicians sponsored by Tavern Guild activists like Ramrod co-owner Paul Bentley/Luscious Lorelei, partner of Bay Area Reporter founder Bob Ross. The Ramrod's elaborate 1970 float, "Zodiac Signs," has the distinction as winner of the first best float prize in the first gay parade.

Peddling "curb service" with his low-budget 1974 Castro Camera "float," Harvey Milk pushed a decorated Safeway grocery cart up Market selling Kodak film retail! Corporate sponsors have since made such local sponsors an endangered species. George Takei of *Star Trek* dancing on a Google float is hardly the same as grassroots Pat Ramseyer and Nancy White, the late owners of the beloved Bernal Heights women's bolthole, Wild Side West, sponsoring prize-winning floats for thirty years.

Gone with the wind are Buzzby's star-spangled Bicentennial float, photographed by Gio Vitacolonna, and built by bar employees Don Barry, Ed Mendez, and Billy Fogelman. Gone are the Lion Pub's "fern bar" float, Toad Hall's flatbed of Castro stoners inhaling helium from their own balloons before Mylar was outlawed, and the Bulldog Bath's signature Peterbilt truck bedecked with handsome bar flies.

Gone is the 1970s steam-punk leatherman-in-livery Ed Linotti proudly driving his 1928 dark-blue stretch Lincoln in many a 1970s line of floats, chauffeuring bar stars like the famous redheaded poet Ron Johnson, the

notorious manager of the No Name.

At the height of orgiastic glory in the queer 1970s, the June 1979 parade stomped angrily up Market. It was only seven months after the assassination of Milk and Moscone. It was only one month after the White Night riot when the SFPD brutally beat dozens of customers inside the Elephant Walk at 18th and Castro. Defiant citizens, like angry villagers with pitchforks and torches, punched handwritten signs into the air demanding, "No more bloody Marys."

As a supporter of the Pride Parade, *Drummer* magazine, with its monthly bar coverage, was the go-to BARTab of its day (1975-1999). Gay bars kept *Drummer* alive with their ads, and it was the main publication of gay bar culture which it both reported on and helped create. During the years I was editor, we sent into the 1978 parade a couple guys wearing sandwich-board signs over their shoulders, front and back, emblazoned with a sentence from our health column "Doctor Dick" which I co-authored at that time with a 1970s primary gay health-care provider, Richard Hamilton, MD. It's freaky now to recall the prescience of our message. In big letters, the signs warned: "Doctor Dick and the Committee to Halt the Advance of Sexually Transmitted Epidemics. Stomp Out Amoebiasis!"

Marching our social-disease message into the glittering streets, *Drummer* was not trying to rain on the parade. Our goal was to create awareness and raise consciousness. Spun out of 1960s civil rights marches, the Pride parade is, in principle, all about messaging. We step off the curb. We stop traffic with strength in numbers. We reclaim the street as a primary gay public space. We celebrate as equals to all the other Irish, Italian, Hispanic, and Chinese identity parades.

(Author's note: As transparent back story to this San Francisco GLBT history, I discovered this 1896 San Francisco *Call* article about transportation and street use in 1979 while rummaging through the files of the SF Muni Railway for whom I worked as a writer and publicist for two years.) \*

Excerpted from the book *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*.  
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